

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee on Appropriations:

My name is Jane Bielefield. I have worked for the Girl Scouts for the past 35 years and have worked in the youth camp industry for over 45 years. I am speaking on behalf of the youth camps throughout Connecticut with regard to the **Governor's Fiscal Year 2023 proposed budget**, specifically the section under the *Department of Developmental Services page B-54 and referencing Initiatives Funded from Federal Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds: Improve Camps for Individuals with Developmental Disability – Allocating \$5,000,000 in FY 2023 for infrastructure improvements for public and privately-operated camps*. This bill will allow camps to bring current infrastructure up to par and best meet the needs of campers who are already vulnerable, those who have developmental disabilities.

Many of the camps that serve the youth of Connecticut are run by non-profit agencies that have very tight budgetary constraints and yet provide incredible experiences for all children, many with a focus on serving those children with developmental disabilities. These camps promote good camping practices and work closely with the CT Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and the American Camp Association (ACA). They are licensed and inspected by the OEC and most are accredited by the ACA, meeting hundreds of standards. The main purpose of our camps is to give safe educational and recreational experiences, especially for those with developmental disabilities. Campers need to be outdoors, socializing with peers, especially after the past two years.

Girl Scouts of Connecticut runs five camp programs throughout Connecticut. Girls who attend our camps often come with a variety of developmental disabilities. Funding like this would allow us to develop more appropriate properties that would best meet the needs of our campers and thus offer a more robust program and allow us to expand our reach to more campers who needed such accommodations. We do our best but funding would assist us to provide a better more appropriate space.

I strongly support this bill. You can help our camps to expand services especially in a time of recovery and rebirth from the pandemic. Funding for infrastructure improvements for developmentally disabled campers would lead to more opportunities being provided by a camp that may not currently offer these services. I feel this would be important for all children in Connecticut who may not have been able to attend camp in the past and expand abilities for all camps to be inclusive and accommodating.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my position and I look forward to a healthy conversation about this topic and how, together, we can create more access to summer camp for all in the state of Connecticut.

I appreciate your time and I am more than willing to answer any questions regarding this topic or provide further information. I can be reached by email at jbielefield@gsocfct.org or by phone at (800) 922-2770 ext. 3340. Thank you for your time and consideration.